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ABSTRACT

The author conducted a self-study of his emotional experience as an elementary teacher. During a sabbatical from a position as an education professor in a teacher education department, he spent 1 year teaching half-time in a first-second-third grade blended classroom. Teacher emotions were located in a larger sociocultural context. The paper examines the experiences of joy, anxiety, embarrassment, and guilt as well as the overall experiences of frustration and emotional management. It concludes that teaching is inherently emotionally stressful work, and much of the stress is contained in the role and social structure of teachers' work. Among a set of recommendations, the paper calls for the explicit study of emotions in teacher education curricula. In addition, it is recommended that teacher education programs teach political advocacy skills so teachers can more effectively influence policy decisions that affect the quality of their work lives. (Contains 26 references.) (Author/SM)

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# The Emotional Uncertainties of Teaching:

# A Missing Link in Teacher Education

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Abstract

The author did a self-study of his emotional experience as a elementary teacher. During a sabbatical from a position as an education professor in a teacher education department, the author spent one year teaching half-time in a first-second-third grade blended classroom. Teacher emotions were located in a larger socio-cultural context. The paper examines the experience of joy, anxiety, embarrassment and guilt as well as the overall experience of frustration and emotional management. It is concluded that teaching is inherently emotionally stressful work, and much of the stress is contained in the role and social structure of teachers' work. Among a set of recommendations, the author calls for the explicit study of emotions in teacher education curricula. In addition, it is recommended that teacher education programs teach political advocacy skills so teachers can more effectively influence policy decisions that effect the quality of their work lives.

The Emotional Uncertainties of Teaching:
A Missing Link in Teacher Education

Last year, I taught elementary school. My class was a non-graded primary, a group of students who in conventional terms would be classified as first, second and third graders. I am a professor in a school of education, and this was my sabbatical year (or, as I came to realize, my anti-sabbatical year).

One of the most interesting dimensions of my return as an elementary teacher related to emotions and my emotional response to my work with students, colleagues and parents. Basically, I found that teaching was a profoundly, all encompassing *emotional* endeavor. Not unlike our emotional life outside school or the workplace, I emoted it all as a teacher: guilt, joy, embarrassment, sadness, anxiety, depression, satisfaction and anger. At times, I was completely enveloped by emotion, and at most times I was simply conscious of some moderate degree of emotion. Because I kept a daily journal through the year, I was certainly more aware of my emotional response to work than I would have been if I hadn't done this self-study.

What is the rationale for a study of the emotional dimensions of teaching? My hunch is that emotions play an important role in the quality of one's work as a teacher. Our emotions alert us to the status of our experience. They provide a signal that something is right or wrong about experience, that something isn't what it ought to be. I feel angry, for example, and it is the somatic and cognitive effects of the emotion that lead us to make adjustments or take action to resolve the source of the anger. Emotions similarly alert us to the fact that we are satisfied or dissatisfied with our work lives. This awareness also enhances our strategic knowledge to make adjustments in both ourselves and our environment. Finally, the demands of emotions on the job can lead to dysfunctional patterns of emoting, which may influence undue stress and, worse, alienation of one's self from one's work life. However, this topic is largely ignored by teacher education (Liston and Zeichner, 1991). The topic of emotional labor has recently become an important topic in sociology (e.g., Hochschild, 1983), but it is a marginal topic in the educational literature (for exceptions, see A. Hargreaves, 1984; Kelchtermans, 1996; Nias, 1989, 1996). This paper, which is a part of a larger study which examines teacher identity development, explores the emotional dimensions of teaching and its implications for teacher education.

My thesis is that public school teaching, inherently, is emotionally stressful. The stress and emotion of teaching is *contained* in the role, as it has been historically constituted since the beginning of the last century. Instead of pursuing a psychological examination of teacher emotions, my focus is the relationship between social structure and emotions. I think that any psychological explanation alone for teachers' emotions is simplistic, and it overlooks social processes that profoundly effect how people experience and display emotion.

The social structure of schools is reflected in certain material, structural and cultural conditions. A partisan view of the material and structural conditions of schooling include, for example, unwieldy class sizes, reduced resources, mandatory student attendance, increasingly

prescriptive and rigorous curriculum and academic standards, and short time lines in order to accomplish learning goals. Exacerbating these material and structural conditions, teachers may be encumbered with (idealistic) cultural beliefs about teaching and schooling that are in opposition to the (often severe) reality of everyday teaching. Given these material, structural and cultural contexts of public schools, contexts which I might add are historical and have their origins in the inception of public schools a century ago, the disconnect between certain dominant cultural beliefs about teaching and the reality of school life is the basis for an emotionally stressful work life for teachers. Fundamentally, I find that teaching in the current climate of "educational reform" is a pessimistic endeavor. Teachers who find their work to be more rewarding and satisfying (than not) are those individuals whose working conditions reflect and support, to some degree, their sense of self and conception of what it means to be a good teacher.

## What are Emotions and Why Do We have Them?

Kemper (1978) provides a basic definition of emotions: "a relatively short-term evaluative response essentially positive or negative involving distinct somatic (and often cognitive) components" (p, 47). Somatic refers to bodily changes that result from emotions, like increased blood pressure, breathing, and pulse, bodily flush and perspiration. The cognitive component of emotion refers to one's actual verbal reflection that identifies the emotion, like when one thinks or says, "I am happy..."

There are two fundamental ways of looking at the origin of emotions. A traditional view, reflected in the work of Darwin and Freud, conceptualizes emotions as rooted or driven by our biology (i.e., instinct) or psychology (the individual's own psychological health). Emotions exist in our biology or psyche independently of social situations. Emotion, from this perspective, is something that "happens" to us, as a result of some stimulating social experience. Social or environmental factors set off biological reactions which lead to an emotional response. The role of the social environment, from a traditional perspective, is to make sure that the emotions are expressed in more or less socially appropriate ways.

A second broad way of looking at emotions is social interactionism, reflected in the work of Gerth and Mills (1964), Goffman (1959), and Hochschild (1983). From this perspective, social factors have a significant effect on how people develop, manage and show emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Gerth and Mills (1964) maintain that institutions and emotions are inextricably linked. The emotions that people use simply reflect the needs of institutions and the roles that serve those institutions. Interactionists acknowledge that biology is always a component in emotions. However, while interactionists recognize the biological and psychological origins of emotion, they give more weight to the social: "social factors enter not simply before and after but interactively during the expression of emotion" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 211).

From an interactionist perspective, our emotional expressions serve to defend or express social norms and beliefs. Armon-Jones (1986) believes that emotions have a socio-functional purpose. Emotions are "functional in that they are constituted and prescribed in such a way as to sustain and endorse systems of belief and value" (Armon-Jones, 1986, p. 57). Reflecting the idea

that emotion and personality reflect social structure and role, Sarbin (1986) maintains that emotions and how we respond emotionally is "tied to values, to conditions that involve one's identity..." (p. 91).

In other words, emotion is essentially a strategy used by actors to defend or enhance their sense of self. For example, as a teacher, I may become embarrassed when a parent observes my class when the students are out of order. In my teaching culture, a "good teacher" is able to keep their classroom under control. My self, or identity, which reflects this prevailing norm, is threatened when the parent observes me with the disruptive class. I fear a loss of status in the parent's perspective, since I want to be viewed as a competent teacher. My self is threatened. Therefore, I take subsequent action so this doesn't happen again. The emotion, embarrassment, expresses my value that "good teachers" are able to maintain an orderly classroom. Furthermore, my embarrassment heightens my resolve to respond to the problem of disorderly students, since I want to avoid the "pain" of embarrassment!

## A Portrait of My Self as a Middle-Aged Teacher

Everything we do as teachers is aimed at either fending off attacks or threats to our self or enhancing and nurturing the self (Nias, 1989). By self, I mean the totality of how we view ourselves in relation to the world: our beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors and language. Our self is a complex pastiche of knowledge we have about ourselves, in different situations and with different audiences. Who I am (i.e., my self) is something that I construct from a lifetime of social experiences, with significant others. I learn to see myself as I think others see me. Furthermore, our self is related to the roles we play, the cultural expectations for these roles, and the situations we are faced when playing these roles. I sense that there is a substantial, or core self, that is deep seated and is consistent across situations (e.g., Turner, 1968). However, there are important aspects of our selves that are situational and driven by the social groups and institutions to which we belong. Turner (1976) maintains that an important dimension of our self is what the person crafts in order to fulfill the demands of social institutions and roles, and the most effective individuals "will play at least the most crucial roles to the hilt" (p. 1008). Becker (1964), de-emphasizing the permanent or unitary features of self, argued that people have multiple selves, for the multiplicity of situations and roles that they play in everyday lives. I also believe that who we are, our self, is fluid, dynamic, situational and role-driven.

My self as a teacher reflects three experiences: (1) my institutional biography (as a student and teacher), (2) my personal biography (experiences, interests, political values, and personal disposition and style, and (3) my current work situation. I am the sum of my experience *in interaction with the current situation.* For teachers, the teaching self reflects their broad ideas about curriculum and teaching: the purpose of school, how people learn, the role of students and parent in public education, how teachers learn, how teachers should interact with each other, etc. Generally, my teaching self reflects the following idea and beliefs:

*The purpose of schools is to inform a more critical and participatory citizenry and to enhance a democratic way of life.

*People learn by constructing their own knowledge, in collaboration with more knowledgeable others, in the context of authentic activity.

*Good teachers maintain an orderly classroom and promote student learning.

*Good teachers work together, collaboratively, to raise and solve problems about their practice.

*Good teachers care about the intellectual, emotional and social development of all of their students.

*Curriculum should promote multicultural knowledge, including helping students learn to take action on behalf of social justice.

*Good teachers enjoy their work, enjoy being with children, and are able to nurture classrooms that are joyful and productive learning environments.

*Teachers and students should develop warm personal relationships, which form the basis of their instructional or educational relationship.

My biography, too long to include here in its completeness, contains several critical people and incidents that have framed my personal and professional perspectives. My parents were political liberals, so the concern for poor people reflected the rhetoric and voting behavior of my family. My parents also expressed a hope for racial and economic equity and justice. A critical incident that precipitated my entering the teaching profession occurred in 1974, when I saw the movie, Conrack. The movie valorizes a young male teacher who seeks to "make a difference in kids' lives" when working in an impoverished school off the coast of South Carolina. I have not lost complete sight of my original motive for going into teaching.

I taught elementary grades (grades three, four, five and six) from 1976-84, worked for a year as an assistant principal in an elementary school from 1984-85. From 1985-87 I got married and we traveled around the world, ending up in Japan where we taught conversational English. From 1987-1998, I was a doctoral student and then a professor in an education department in a large state university in the northwest United States. Although I had had many ad hoc teaching experiences as a doctoral student and then professor, I had not been in complete charge of a classroom of elementary students for almost 14 years.

## Contexts of Teaching

There are at least four types of context that effected how I experienced teaching: the material, structural, cultural and situational contexts. The material and structural context has to do with the objective reality of my work: material supplies and budget available to me as a teacher; numbers of students in my class; the architecture and size of my classroom; numbers of special needs and second language students in my class; the quality of special education support; the daily and yearly calendar; deadlines for state tests; mandated curricular goals from the district and state; the amount of planning time for my own personal planning as well as planning with colleagues; and staff development opportunities.

Culture has to do with the norms and beliefs that guide people's behavior, in any group setting. Culture occurs at many levels. In the case of teachers, there is the culture of one's grade

level colleagues, or colleagues who inhabit the same geographic space in the school. Then there is the culture of the school. Beyond the school are the values and beliefs represented in the curriculum, policies, budgeting, and practices of the school district administration as well as the bureaucratic apparatus of the state department of education. Of course, there is the general culture, of the immediate community and beyond, of how everyday people, newspaper editors, and politicians come to believe about schools and teaching.

The everyday situational context of my teaching has to do with the subjective reality of my relations with students and colleagues. This context is influenced by the material, structural and cultural contexts. However, it is also profoundly influenced by my own biography (my own values, beliefs, personal idiosyncracies, interests and psychology) and the biographies of my students and colleagues. Our relationships are constructed from many iterations of negotiation and trial and error, usually to a point in which we are able to instantiate a working consensus so things can happen in classrooms like they are "supposed" to.

The school is located in the low-income section of town, so about 90% of the school's students are on free or reduced lunches. About 85% of the students are Euro-American, and most of the others are Hispanic and Asian-American. The school has a full-time counselor, full-time family liaison specialist, a Title 1 reading specialist and a resource-room teacher. In addition, all the primary classrooms had full-time aides, funded by Title 1. With a small enrollment of about 200 students, Woodbridge Elementary School contained eight classes: three 4/5 blended classes, and five 1/2/3 blended classes, and two half-day kindergartens. In 1990, before the district gave parents the choice to enroll their children in any school in the district, there were about 325 students enrolled at Woodbridge. The flight of the middle class from the school since 1990 has been due to an interaction of two factors: middle-class anxiety about the presence of poor and indigent families and children in the school community, which accounted for about half the student body; and the school's shift to a student-centered philosophy and the accompanying use of non-graded classes, which many parents did not understand or support.

The culture of the school reflected a child-centered approach, typical of the English infant schools of the 1960s. The school, behind the leadership of the principal and a group of activist teachers, began to take a constructivist, child-centered approach in the early 1990s. Textbooks were abandoned, and teachers constructed curriculum using a collections of constructivist teaching materials (e.g., Burns, 1992). Classes were combined with mixed age groups of children in what is called "non-graded primary". Teaching and curriculum reflected constructivism, although the intermediate (fourth and fifth grades) teachers also used more text-based approaches. At Woodbridge, classroom management practices tended to avoid extrinsic reward systems and, instead, relied on the notion of building community, appeals to group pressure and "making good choices" (e.g., When a student misbehaved, a typical adult response was, "What should you be doing now?" Or when one student hurt another, the victim is directed to tell the perpetrator, "Tell Oscar how that made you feel.") The emphasis here was to teach kids to solve their own social problems. A directive approach, in which teachers *tell* students the solutions to problems, was less evident at Woodbridge.

I job shared with Dorothy, a veteran of about 20 years as a classroom teacher. Dorothy taught the morning (reading and writing); at 11:15am, I arrived at the school, debriefed with her for about 10 minutes about the morning, and then the students entered the room after lunch recess at 12:15pm. Between then and 2:35pm, I taught mathematics, social studies, science and storytelling.

Dorothy was an experienced and committed practitioner of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), and the most forceful spokesperson for this perspective in the building. However, DAP was under attack. The school was in the process of realigning the curriculum to match performance standards mandated by the state. This was just one dilemma faced by Woodbridge teachers: how to integrate the state and district mandate for standards-based teaching and assessment with the historical vision of the school, which was child-centered. However, the rationale of non-graded primary organization now appeared to be in conflict with the requirements of state tests and standards-based assessment.

Many of the original group of teachers and principal had either transferred or retired. Some of the faculty saw problems with developmentally appropriate practice, particularly with our low-income and high needs student population. I did sense that some teachers were struggling with the challenge to redefine child-centered education so that it fit with the pressing demands of high-need students, in an environment of dwindling school budgets and resources, and the ominous shadow of state tests and standards. Some teachers and the new principal considered a uniformly implemented (to all students) DAP approach to be inappropriate in a high-poverty school. Some teachers in the building disagreed, and this question was a topic of conversation and contention during the year.

I taught 25 students in a classroom typical in size and shape: a rectangular room that is 25 feet by 30 feet. Of my 25 students, about half showed signs of exceptionality. These included attention deficit disorder, reactive attachment disorder, chronic depression, and conduct disorder. Two of my students were fetal alcohol babies, and their behaviors were often volatile, immature, and irrational (to me). At least four of the students were suspected of being victims of sexual abuse.

I kept a personal journal of my year as a classroom teacher. Every night, I wrote impressionistically about my day. In the journal, I generated description and interpretation of the experience. I also wrote teaching plans. For this self-study, I read each journal entry and identified and coded each entry in which I explicitly made a (cognitive) reference to an emotion (e.g., I am angry, or I feel good...). I categorized this data by emotions (i.e., satisfaction, anger, anxiety, etc.). The presentation of my emotions, which follows, reflects this categorization process along with interpretation that uses a socio-cultural/interactionist perspective.

## A Cautionary Note

I experienced much more satisfaction and joy as a teacher than I depict in the description that follows. In fact, my year back in the classroom was a personally and professionally satisfying experience. I grew to love my students and colleagues, and I looked forward to work for the most

part (especially beginning in late January when my teaching skills improved). There was a good deal of laughter, affection, enjoyment and sentimentality in my relations with students and colleagues. I tried to care for all of my students, and my efforts to care were reciprocated often by students. As the year came to an end, I became increasingly maudlin at the prospect of not seeing the kids everyday. An image on the last day of school will forever be etched in my memory. Several of my students would not let go of me. I remember standing with them in the middle of the room, held together with a long sad hug. Already, I am thinking about my next sabbatical in five years, when I may again return to the classroom as a full-time teacher.

However, in this paper, I focus on the dark side of teaching, for several reasons. The dark side is real and consequential in the lives of teachers, but systematic accounts of teachers' experience of the dark side are rarely told. When it goes unexamined, the vagaries of teachers' emotional life pose a serious risk to the profession. It is the dark emotions that, if unchecked and misunderstood, can lead teachers to premature retirement or, worse, a loss of job satisfaction and a depressed interest in professional and personal development, as it relates to teaching. This dimension of teaching is a story, my story, that needs to be told systematically and empirically, and I do it here.

## My Emotional Life as a Teacher

I made explicit reference to four broad types of emotion in my journal: 1) satisfaction/joy, 2) anxiety/fear, 3) embarrassment/shame and 4) guilt. Anger and depression are also referenced but as subcategories of anxiety. Description of each category of emotion follows, along with how these emotions reflected the situational and socio-cultural context of my work.

### Satisfaction/Joy

I felt satisfaction or joy when my teaching was consistent with my conception of the "good teacher". When I am satisfied, my sense of self as a teacher and the quality of my relations at work were aligned. And from my subjective reality, my sense of power and status were adequate in these relations (Kemper, 1986). My sense of satisfaction reflected at least four experiences.

First, I felt satisfaction from work in warm and affectionate personal relations with students. I liked the students, and they liked me, evidenced by displays of affection we showed each other.

> *One dimension of my work that sustains me is my relationship with the students....I really enjoy talking to them and being with them. Some kids clap when I enter the room. I get many hugs. (December 16, 1998)*

I suppose that the extent of the physical displays of affection towards me by the students stemmed from their psychological needs that were not being met at home, and this led to some inappropriate displays. In this case the students provided me with more deference, or status, that was appropriate to my role, and these events led me to feel small pangs of embarrassment. For example, students sometimes kissed me on the cheek, like one would kiss a parent.

> *Kevin sneaked up behind me and gave me a kiss on the neck. He was being playful. I*

*laughed and told him to kiss his parents and not me. Hugs are good enough. (April 13, 1999)*

Other occasions when the students' affection caused me some embarrassment was when they were under the supervision of another teacher (like the PE teacher), and they would spontaneously run over to me for hugs. In these cases, the other teachers became upset with me, but they managed this emotion by the use of humor (e.g., "Hey Ken, they're all *yours*!" and then they'd feign exiting the scene.). I believe that good teachers are modest and do not blow their own horn, in this case the quality of my warm relations with students. To reduce this minor threat to my self, I talked to the students about appropriate ways to behave and show affection in different situations.

A second experience that incited satisfaction was when I was affirmed by others for my work with students. These affirmations, which occurred both privately and publically, reflected and nurtured my sense of self. One day, an aide popped her head in my room after school and said that she appreciated the fact that my classroom atmosphere was decorous and civil and the students tended to be on-task. Her assessment was similar to my own, so I felt that her comments were justified. In the beginning of the year, when my main problem was classroom management, I was deeply satisfied when I was complimented on the orderliness of the class, like for a fire drill.

*When they went out (for the fire drill), their line was perfectly straight, and their verbal demeanor was calm....Several teachers commented, "This is the first time I've seen this class line up so quietly (for you)." Ordinarily, I would be disdainful of a compliment on my students' lining up skills....For now, I don't care about the curriculum, the state tests next spring, math problem writing, and the other heady features of the explicit curriculum. My head swelled with pride." (October 1, 1998)*

Often, however, compliments has a double edge. They incited some sense of satisfaction, since the compliments (when they actually reflected my subjective experience) nurtured my self. Sometimes, however, when the compliment brushed up against some other (competing) belief, or it didn't exactly jive with experience, a part of me would become embarrassed. For example, at a special education staffing for Tyler, his mother shared with eight teachers and special education specialists around the table how her son continuously talked about me at home and how, to the boy, I am like a rock star. I remember smiling and feeling some authentic sense of satisfaction. At the same time, I also felt embarrassment: first, because I believed that the status conferred on me by the mother was undeserved and, perhaps, unwanted; and second, my teaching partner, who worked with equal commitment and concern with the boy in the morning, was present at the meeting and the "blowing of one's horn", even if done by others, is not something that is done in the culture of teachers.

By far, the most common experience leading to a feeling of satisfaction related to my actual teaching and students' academic work. The criteria for being satisfied, or finding pleasure,

in my work with students varied slightly as the year progressed. In the beginning of the year, when order was my biggest concern, an orderly class signaled intense feelings of satisfaction, even joy! Early in the year, I didn't care if the students were learning as long as the class was civil. As the year (and my teaching skills) progressed, the criteria for having a "satisfying" day similarly progressed. By early Winter, a feeling of satisfaction about students' work behavior occurred when three conditions were in place. First, students were wholeheartedly engaged in academic tasks. Second, the tasks reflected my beliefs about worthwhile educational activity. And third, my use of power to maintain order was mild and indirect. Fortunately, this type of satisfaction was frequent beginning in late January when my teaching skills began to mature. It is important to note that my definition of the satisfying day is consistent with the institutional bias of my school. In the school, coercive uses of teacher power are frowned upon, and the rhetoric and practice of the other teachers emphasized "making learning fun" and hands on. My interest in a constructivist and multicultural curriculum is also consistent with the institutional bias. Here are three examples from my journal.

*Good day. We dissected owl pellets, a part of a unit on food webs. For some of the kids, this was a religious experience. We had posters of the skeletal anatomy of voles, moles and mice. The kids worked with tweezers and carefully compared their discoveries with the poster examples. The most exciting part was their discovery of skulls and teeth. (February 23, 1999)*

*Good day. I introduced jazz...I read some children's literature, a story about a boy who loved to play jazz on the trumpet. We watched a Reading Rainbow video about jazz. We discussed the idea of improvisation and its application to other artistic domains besides music. I improvised a story, and then I talked about dance improvisation. I then played a tape by Thelonious Monk. The kids came to the front in pairs and alone and did improvisational dancing. We had a great time, learning about improvisation and jazz. (April 15, 1999)*

*Great day! Math problem solving went well. Everyone engaged. Then, Susan's fourth and fifth graders came in and taught my kids how to make paper cranes. It was beautiful to watch her kids sitting, one on one, with my kids, teaching them how to make fairly complicated origami design.*

*After recess, some kids continued making cranes while others chose to work in their usual centers. Periodically, during center time, the kids broke out in spontaneous singing (of some of the songs we'd taught them this year), like Lean on Me. I felt that the adults and kids, for a few fleeting minutes, were truly on the same page...A productive math period, singing together, makes cranes together, laughing...adults and kids sharing a common activity that both wholeheartedly enjoyed.... (May 21, 1999)*

I felt satisfaction and joy when the curriculum (and my teaching) reflected my ideas about worthwhile educational activity (e.g., jazz, math problem solving, hands on science), and the students shared my "definition of the situation", that the activity was, indeed, interesting and worthwhile. In this case, I can rely on more indirect uses of teacher power to manage their behavior, which is another feature of my teaching self: the good teacher does not rely on brute power to effect students' behavior. The teacher uses interesting curricular activity, shared conceptions of a learning community, and personal persuasion as *indirect* classroom management strategies. My self as a teacher, in effect, was nurtured when the three conditions were met.

Anxiety/Fear

Anxiety and fear are the most common "negative" emotion reflected in the journal entries. Anxiety (which, if unchecked, can be intensified into the emotion, fear) derives from an experience of powerlessness (Kemper, 1986). Anxiety can reflect a "felt insufficiency of one's own power..." implying that one's "lack of power is due to one's own incapacities and deficiencies" (Kemper, 1986, p. 56). If the person is the agent of his own insufficient power, Kemper suggests that the anxiety is introjected into feelings of doom and gloom, such as depression and despair.

Anxiety can also reflect a situation in which one is subject to the power of another. While the emotion is still anxiety, the outcome is now one in which the person introjects the anxiety into anger and hostility. Here, the "anxious response is manifested in rebelliousness against order, commands and requests, which are ignored, disobeyed and avoided" (Kemper, 1986, p. 58). One's resistance to the more powerful other is not due to the wisdom of the order but, instead, to the loss of self determination and control.

I had a lot of anxiety last year, and much of it related to my own sense of incompetence in the areas of classroom management, curriculum, and assessment. However, my sense of incompetency was fundamentally rooted in the particular social conditions that I happened to experience as a public school teacher at this particular school.

Classroom management was a continuous concern all year, although there was a marked improvement in the second half of the year. My teaching self reflected a humanistic and democratic approach to classroom governance. My conception of my self as a good teacher who can manage an orderly learning environment was under continuous attack. When I had to resort to heavy-handed, more coercive methods for managing the class, this did not correspond to my prior beliefs about classroom governance. The immediate emotion was anxiety, and this anxiety gradually introjected in other mostly unpleasant emotions, which include despair/depression, anger and guilt.

The demands of managing a one-three blended classroom, the high number of special needs students, and squeezing 25 kids in the typically crowded physical space of the elementary classroom, all combined with my inexperience to result in an almost continuous struggle (and resulting angst) to maintain order. Here is a journal excerpt from the first day in January after Winter Break, a challenging day for many teachers.

*I ask for their eyes, but only three or four kids look up. Or, I ask someone to sit down, and she ignores me. There was both passive-aggressive behavior and aggressive behavior towards me by the students. A lot of kids simply ignored me, and some kids were openly defiant. The defiant ones were the usual suspects, like Crystal and Nathan. For example, Nathan was sitting in Rob's chair. Rob protested. I said, "Nathan, you need to sit in your chair." He replied, "Why?" I explain. He responded again, "Why?" I explain another way, followed by the same response from Nathan. After several incidents like this throughout the afternoon, Nathan ended up in the school's time-out room. (January 6, 1999)*

Continuously, I grappled with the mismatch between my beliefs about relations with students and the reality of everyday teaching. Often my metaphor for my work was that of a policeman. This image threatened my self as a humanistic teacher. My increasing use of directive and heavy-handed management strategies was a threat to self, and this caused anxiety and despair.

*After break, at 2:00pm, it was time for creative drama. We are beginning with pantomime. One of the student's parents, Jill, comes each Monday at this time to help out. Again, the kids were disruptive. There were loud, physically out-of-control, and often oblivious to adult instructions. I presented a scenario, such as eating an ice cream cone on a hot hot day, and then invited students in small groups to the front to act out. I invited anyone who wanted to come to the front to pretend to hold a bird with a broken wing. Twenty students came to the front. I should have had them come to the front in small groups. I am not sure how to structure drama differently. But I am sure that it needs to change. By 2:25, when I asked Fran to read a story, I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I felt like a policeman...who did a very poor job. (September 22, 1998)*

*Another teacher visited me after school and admitted feeling guilty about his/her recent more autocratic martinet-type behavior with students. This teacher was schooled in Glasser and Dreikurs and had always worked at implementing humanistic forms of governance in his/her classrooms. Recently, many of his/her students had become completely unresponsive to indirect management signals and appeals to kids' sense of what it means to be a "good citizen." The teacher was anxious by the gap between her ideals and the realities of the class. I empathized and spoke of my own sleepless nights as I worried about the same problem. (December 2, 1998)*

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was probably suffering from depression more than I would like to admit. I often woke up at 4:30am and, unable to go back to sleep, I went downstairs and wrote in my journal. Early in the year, I despaired about my future as a teacher educator. If I couldn't begin to find more joy and satisfaction in the work of teaching, how could I, in good faith, communicate the personal or affective benefits of teaching to preservice teachers. Still, I

was more concerned with my everyday mental health.

> *I am less concerned about my future integrity as a teacher educator than I am about my present mental health. I feel myself falling into an anxious depression which is difficult to ignore. I am at the outset of a five-day weekend (without students), and I have spent too much time ruminating about my teaching problems. I realize that this is unproductive thinking and I need to simply stop myself from thinking these kind of thoughts. (November 24, 1999)*

I was anxious that my status as a competent teacher (and competent teacher educator) was under constant attack. Implicit in my status as a teacher educator was the expectation that I knew what I was doing. This was my own expectation, and I imagined everyone around me had the same expectation! However, my status as a "competent teacher" was being rejected: by the students, and by my own assessment of some very poor teaching. Despair and hopelessness happens when one sees one's self as the agent of the deficit or "if one feels there is no hope of remedy because one does not have the capacity or the means to change the situation to evoke status conferral from the other" (Kemper, 1986, p. 65). Early in the year, before I began more fully critiquing my objective work conditions, I saw myself as the main culprit in my pathetic teaching situation. Kemper suggests that, in this situation, more aggression will be expressed by the self toward the self..."a higher degree of deprecation of the self as a result of shame" (p. 65), leading to depression. In October and November, I saw a psychotherapist. We worked on strategies to help me more effectively control the "anxiety tape" running incessantly in my head.

Anxiety leads to anger, particularly when one feels powerless and a more powerful other takes action on you that you deem undesirable (Kemper, 1986). I found myself becoming angry with the students when I had no control over them and, in my head, it appeared that they were "in charge." My perception here signaled a violation of the cultural norm that it is the adult who is supposed to be in control of children and not the other way around. I often felt situations when students were wielding more power than me. The folkloric teacher metaphor, "in the trenches", was an apt description of my working conditions. I usually displayed anger by raising the volume of my voice, gesticulating more aggressively with my arms, making my eyes look mad, and tightening the voice. The immediate practical consequence of my anger was usually desirable: the class would be more orderly. The reality that one does not have control over one's students is scary and potentially shameful for a teacher, given the cultural expectations. In fact, in the culture of public schools, the use of anger by adults as a response to disorder is often a sensible response. I heard, on several occasions, from teachers and aides, that "sometimes kids need to see us get mad. This is what they're used to at home, so this is what they understand!"

The catch-22 was that my displays of anger had the subsequent effect on me of guilty feelings. So, the kids would be out of control (or in control!), I would show anger, exert my superior power, they would quiet down, and then I would feel badly (i.e., guilt) since the anger is inconsistent with my conception of teaching self. I see myself as a kind, caring and nurturing person and teacher, someone who is values and uses more humanistic approaches to influence

students' behavior. I wrote the following excerpt after a show of anger at the end of the day.

> *I lost my cool for about five minutes, and for this I feel guilty. I don't want to treat students in this way. I have other strategies for dealing with chaos, but for some reason I let my anger take over...I know that some teachers might applaud the occasional use of explicit anger to control students. I don't agree. I want people to behave appropriately for reasonable reasons, and not out of fear of physical or psychic harm. I want my students to behave in a civil manner because they care about having a respectful community and because they care about themselves as self-respecting people. (March 3, 1999)*

In situations like this which were more frequent than I would like to admit, I suffered an emotional roller coaster. First, I would feel anxious because I was inadequately using my potential power as a teacher. The students would have tacitly gained a "counter hegemony" (Hargreaves, 1972) in our relationship. Experiencing some level of fear, I would sense the impending shame if my community fully learns of my incompetence at controlling the students, so I would respond to this threat (to self) with anger, which in effect would help me reassert my power. However, this excessive use of power in a way that is inconsistent with self and would lead to feelings of guilt.

Another source for anxiety was the mismatch between the school's institutional bias and its material and structural conditions and the reality of my everyday teaching. Furthermore, there was a disconnect between the school's bias and the assumptions of the school district and state standards and benchmarks and the state tests.

The school's bias reflected constructivism and the child-centered structure of non-graded primary. The organizational structure grouped students in non-graded classrooms. In this structure, olders would mentor youngers; academic tasks are whole, authentic and project-based; and students have some control over the content and timing of their work on academic tasks. Partly for financial reasons and partly for philosophical reasons, the school had abandoned the use of well-structured textbooks and, instead, opted to use collections of "constructivist" lessons and activities, across the subject areas. Teachers, therefore, had to construct the curriculum each week. In theory, the idea of teachers constructing curriculum, instead of relying on textbooks, was an exciting professional opportunity and something that I believed was a professional behavior typical of "good teachers." My self was closely aligned with constructivist theory and practice.

However, the reality of my everyday teaching and the material, structural and cultural conditions at Woodbridge meshed like two trains colliding at 100 mph, and this disconnect was the root of much anxiety. High anxiety! First, my class and the other classes in the school served large numbers of special needs students, students who interacted with the world through lenses filtered by issues related to attention deficit, conduct disorder, sexual abuse, prenatal alcohol, and home lives pressured by financial woes. We simply had too many students who needed more structure, different structures, than were provided by the mainstream middle-class curriculum of

non-graded primary. I had a first-third grade blend of students who, for the most part, couldn't sit still and engage in civil conversations, work collaboratively with peers, or solve rudimentary social problems without very direct adult support. For many of these kids, open-ended problems required much more adult support than we had adults available.

For some of our students, a developmentally appropriate curriculum (as we were imaging it, as we were implementing it) was, indeed, appropriate. However, for many other kids, I believe it was inappropriate. In addition, the teachers working without textbooks had to invent and construct the curriculum each week, from a hodgepodge of materials which represented, we believed, the "best curriculum." There was disagreement among the faculty, however, about whether a uniformly consistent child-centered approach was appropriate for all the students. Still, even with some disagreement among faculty, the general institutional bias (reflected in our curricular materials, non-graded classroom structure, and school mission statement) all set a cultural expectation that we teachers continue teaching and managing students in a way that, to some of us, did not match the existing practical conditions.

All year, there had been almost a war between my conception of self (as a constructivist) and my struggle to implement this perspective *here*. It was like trying to fit square pegs in round holes. The anxiety I felt came from a continuous sense of inadequacy, that I wasn't able to implement my constructivist self here with these kids. It didn't fully dawn on me until early Spring that my curricular paradigm may have been wrong for this time and place. It is then that I started reading the special education literature, and I learned about different mental "disorders", such as attention deficit disorder, reactive attachment disorder and fetal alcohol babies. The literature was resolute in its position that certain kids need different environments and, if these environments are appropriate, all (or most of these) kids can succeed. I understood this idea before, but it was tacit and implicit. I knew the idea in theory, that instruction needs to meet the particular needs of children. However, at Woodbridge, the dominant cultural myth of child-centered education had left me banging my head against the wall much of the year.

> *Something is not right about how we do teaching, the curriculum and the physical arrangement of classes. My sense is that we need to be much more structured, do more direct instruction, give kids fewer choices, and rearrange the layout of classrooms to account for distractibility. Not all kids need this hyper-structured environment, but maybe half do. I would love to get desks and put my kids into rows. I would like to find some credible textbooks and get the kids focused on this work. I would like to implement a tight behavior modification program for the kids who need it....I would like to give each student their own desk, so they can learn to take care of their own place. And then, when there is some calm and quiet and focus, only then must we begin teaching kids how to cooperate, how to make decisions over increasingly complex choices, how to find the answers to their own questions, how to solve their own social problems and, yes, how to think critically both of text and their social lives.*
>
> *But I am scared about making these suggestions, in general and certainly at this school. (April 27, 1999)*

My realizations about the mismatch between the curriculum and the students served to reduce much of my anxiety, the kind that stemmed from feelings of personal inadequacy and incompetence. However, I had intense anxiety and fear about going public with my ideas of restructuring the environment, especially putting kids in rows and individual desks. Part of my self still considered rows and desks to be inconsistent with "good teaching". What I found more risky was the possibility of public censure by the other teachers at Woodbridge, who also looked at rows and desks with even more disdain than me.

The last type of anxiety derived from my role in a large bureaucratic organization and the inevitable feelings of powerlessness in relation to organizational and institutional demands and requirements. In this situation, the anxiety usually led to anger. The anger was directed to forces outside my classroom, like the principal, district superintendent, school district, state department of education and state legislature.

At a very basic level, many of the bureaucracy's expectations and requirements were in opposition with what I believed was important in terms of curriculum. For example, the state tests have a very rigorous academic focus with a rather high standard for "passing". I constantly questioned the appropriate focus in my teaching: social skills or academic skills. Many of our students came from discombobulated home lives, and they came to school in great need of anti-violence curricula and social skills work. Many of these kids needed a lot of time working with peers in how to resolve problems, peer mediation, and self-management strategies. I agree, in theory, with the outcomes contained in standards-based curricula. However, the reality of these standards at a school like Woodbridge is that a) many of these kids were in no way ready to effectively meet the "passing" standard, c) many of these kids would benefit from a curriculum that more substantially incorporated social development curricula into the program, and c) many of these kids are simply being set up for failure, especially later on in school when the assessments become more obtuse and are, instead, appropriate for the elite (top 25%) students. At Woodbridge, many teachers (including me) intuitively sensed that the so-called reforms was just a new and improved structure to "screen and sort" students for their future economic destiny as adults (Spring, 1976).

It was all very confusing to me. Having a well-defined set of academic standards made sense, but their rigorous use to further disenfranchise students from economically stressed backgrounds didn't make sense. However, I felt anxiety because our students were going to be tested on this material, and the scores would be reported to the world. Also, I felt (anticipatory guilt) that I may have been doing a disservice to the students by not helping them do well on the tests, which in our society is a vehicle to a successful academic and economic destiny. Compounding these confusions were the material and structural limits on my teaching, which further impeded my ability to serve both social and academic needs of the students. The state funding model for public education left us with inadequate funding, large classes, an overrun special education teacher, overrun counselors, and even a paucity of paper and overhead projector transparencies.

Anxiety and subsequent anger characterized my emotional response to this situation, and I directed my anger to any entities that represented threats to my need to be a good teacher. Throughout my journal, I rail against the district and our superintendent (for being lackeys to the state bureaucracy), the superintendent (for not truly understanding teachers' work conditions), the state legislature (for not funding us properly), the state department bureaucrats (for being the tool of a wretched system) and, in general, a system that is rigged to work against poor people and teachers working in poor schools. One most immediate (and unfortunate) victim of teachers' anger was our principal. She is a competent and well meaning administrator, but one of her central roles (related to the state "reforms") is to monitor teacher's implementation of state and district standards based curriculum and assessment. I am certain that this role (between the proverbial rock and hard place) caused *her* much anxiety. And beyond her, my anger flowed as I grappled with the personal and very immediate requirements to prepare my students for the tests and other assessments.

> *I am working with the third graders to get them ready for the state math tests on April 12. The teachers in the building are really frazzled by these tests. I am sensing a panoply of emotions and feelings from teachers: inadequacy, anger, frustration, anxiety, resignation and fatigue. Most of our kids are simply not ready, and they are not going to pass the tests. To make matters worse, the test results are published, by school and grade level, in local and state newspapers. And worse, teachers (by name) are identified in published lists that indicate how many kids in their classes met the standard and how many did not.*
>
> *I find it demoralizing that this is the quintessential measure, for much of our educational community, of our effectiveness as schools and as teachers. What is most disheartening is that low test scores will imply that teachers in low poverty schools, like mine, don't work hard and don't work smart. It's ironic. I know that the teachers in my building feel overwhelmed by the demands of our students...the emotional, social and academic demands. And each day, we should show up for work and invest our emotional and intellectual selves to serve these kids. (March 29, 1999)*

Embarrassment

Embarrassment and shame are emotions that emerge from the anxiety when our claims to competence are threatened, and news of my misfortune becomes *public knowledge*. Goffman (1959) observed that when a "presentation" by someone is discovered to be false or fraudulent by others, this leads to a loss of status by the actor. When my performance is inadequate to the status of my public and private self *and others are privy to the performance*, I feel embarrassment and even shame.

I suffered from both embarrassment and anticipated embarrassment. The later represents situations in which I felt at risk of being discovered as less competent. In a sense, much of what I did (or do) is aimed a protecting my self from social embarrassment, and to maintain my existing with various audiences. Early on in the year, I worried that the collapse of my front as the "expert" teacher educator.

*I don't know the kids, they don't know me, and I don't know yet what kind of curriculum is appropriate for them. In my stomach, I sense that this is going to be a difficult year. A feeling that I've had under my skin is now surfacing: I am almost like a beginning teacher...and I think the kids have already picked up on this fact. Uh, oh! The gig is up! (September 3, 1998)*

I even had experiences in which I was embarrassed about being embarrassed. Saul, another teacher, one day came into my room a few minutes before I was about to teach. He wanted to observe me, hoping to pick up some new ideas from me!

*I felt my face flush and I became embarrassed. My voice said, "Yeah sure, any time." But I suppose my non-verbal signal was obvious to him, so he backed off saying, "Great...uh...I can't observe today, but I'll come back soon." He was out the door, and he never did come back.*

*I was embarrassed to have him observe me because I didn't feel good about my math program. I have a fuzzy image of what is should look like, but I am light years away from this image. I was also embarrassed at being embarrassed. (November 5, 1998)*

Saul was a former student in a language arts methods class of ten years before. I heard, from mutual friends, that he held me up on a "pedestal" as a teacher. Somehow, I felt threatened to let this public image of Ken be exposed as fraudulent. However, my front when I begged off from the observation was transparent, and I think he pretended to believe it in order to avoid a socially embarrassing situation (Goffman, 1959).

The state tests certainly influenced much anticipatory embarrassment. During report card periods, I was anxious about whether I'd collected enough student assessment data to warrant the judgements made on the card. In the Spring, we held student-led conferences, at which the students lead the discussion with their parents of a large portfolio of their year's work. For four weeks prior to this, I worried about the kids being ready. I was afraid that people would see that I wasn't the teacher that I imagined they thought I was.

My teaching self was subjected to much embarrassment. I would be observed performing poorly, perceive a loss of status and, voila, embarrassment! Parents, colleagues and my intern observed me often when the students were disorderly, and these experiences tended to be embarrassing. I remember once becoming acutely embarrassed when my students acted out in an assembly, in full view of all my colleagues, who I observed did not have as much difficulty as me in managing their students. Occasionally, parents were critical of my choice of curriculum. One parent went so far as to request that her daughter be transferred out of my room, and she brought the question to the "Care Team", composed of teachers, principal and specialists. In the end, we decided that the girl would leave my class for math and walk down the hall to Larry's room for math.

*I have ambivalent feelings about the experience. I feel good, since the experience of*

*disgruntled parent and student is one dimension of teachers' experience. (It's interesting, the mental games I play with myself in order to cope with this experience!) One of my goals this year is to fully experience the life of the everyday teacher. When I experience this type of authentic struggle, in a sense I am meeting my goals for going back to the classroom. On the other hand, I feel badly, even embarrassed, that I was not able to meet the needs of the student and parent, and that I have to depend on the good will and expertise of a colleague in order to bail me out.*

*...The outcome of the meeting is public knowledge among my colleagues. Even if everyone continues to be supportive of me (and they have been), I struggle with the tacit expectation that I am, indeed, able and successful at meeting the needs of all my students. There are other students in my class about whom I worry that I am not meeting their needs. At least for now, this worry is not yet public and only a topic for my internal deliberations. (October 29, 1998)*

I have a teaching self that promotes the "good teacher" as someone who can meet the needs of *all* students and as someone who does not rely on others to solve his problems. (In my head, the second belief is a bit contested, since I also believe that good teachers collaborate.) This incident was particularly damaging to my self since my teaching problem (unable to meet all students' needs) became such public news. I had similar episodes of embarrassment at other times, episodes that I perceived as attacks on my mental health: when a counselor-friend at another school called me up one evening and said, "Hey, I hear you're really getting scarred by this experience"; and when my principal told me that some teachers, from another school, were gossiping about how I was "sinking" in my teaching assignment. In these last two episodes, my self as a confident and competent person were threatened.

Guilt

Guilt arises when one's behavior is at variance with a moral value, especially if one is in a position of power or control. The dominant value that my guilt expressed was the notion that teachers ought to meet the needs of the whole child. Actually, it would have been astounding if I was able to meet just the academic needs of all my students. But I wasn't, so the disconnect between my self and the reality led me to feelings of guilt, which in turn led to feelings of remorse and self-blame. Fundamentally, my guilt related to my ability to meet the needs of my students, their academic and social needs.

*Melinda, Claire, Sam and I are spending a few days in the mountains. I'm walking on this pristine and deserted hilltop, and some of my students keep flying into my head. I worry about Jeff, with whom I've basically lost touch since Leslie (the resource teacher) increased his time in the afternoon. He is in school maybe four days out of five. He sometimes is pulled out of school early by his mother, or he shows up in the late morning. I am so busy with the other 24 kids, I sometimes don't have the mental space to check up on what he is doing, why he isn't in school, why he is getting pulled out. I feel guilty, and I wonder what else I could do for this kid who is a psychological and physical wreck. His*

*needs are beyond my skills. he needs much more than I can offer. (March 6, 1999)*

I realize that there is much more that I can do for Jeff and the other students, but this would mean that I give up parts of my personal life, which I am unwilling to do. Still, the immersion in my work life does effect my personal life. I was so caught up in the rush of school that I forgot my mother's surgery, and I felt quite guilty about this oversight. During the year, I didn't have the psychic energy or actual time that I had for my children before, when I was teaching at the university. I am more impatient with my own children, after difficult days with my school children.

When I was short-tempered or curt with the students, this sometimes led to remorse, since I envision myself as a kind, caring and patient teacher. Sometimes I forgot to care for children in need of caring, particularly when I was overrun with the press of running the class.

*I got to school yesterday and saw Bonnie, one of my students, sitting in the office. She had head lice. Her parents were unavailable to pick her up, so she had to sit in the office all day. In the rush of the afternoon, I forgot about her. I didn't go back once to visit her and see how she was doing. I realized this oversight after I had gotten home. I tried to call her Bonnie at home, but all I got was her father's voice mail. I felt guilty that I'd forgotten her.*

*I would want my daughter's teacher to behave more compassionately to her if she had to sit in the office all day, with head lice. As a criterion for how I ought to interact with my students, I think about how I want my daughter's teachers to interact with her. The Golden Rule... (September 26, 1998)*

Taken-For-Granted Frustration:
The Hidden Emotion for Teachers

It is important that I name one last emotional dimension of my work, perhaps the most pervasive and inescapable. But it is a dimension that is so much a part of our everyday taken-for-granted experience that we do not give it much attention. I believe that teaching is ultimately a frustrating endeavor. This has to do with the fact that almost never will all of one's students do what one intend or hope that they will do. Teachers are often motivated by an ethic of caring, but this requires that students are receptive to teachers' caring initiatives in order for there to be *caring relations*. Noddings (1984) acknowledges that apathetic or unprepared students can be cause for frustration for caring teachers. The outcome of virtually all our work is, at most, approximations of our ideal, our goal. Most teachers cope with this essential limitation of their work, by redefining their selves so they are more accepting of goals and dreams that are only partially realized. Teachers who more effectively manage frustration learn to deflect or avoid the self-blame or self-accusatory flagellation that often happens when things do not go as planned and, instead, they consider the wide range of contributing factors outside themselves. However, even

for the teachers with the most effective coping skills, there is going to be a constant residue of frustration in their work with children, along the concomitant emotions. When I am frustrated ("I want this but I can't have it!"), there is the inevitable sadness, anger or anxiety. The teacher who copes well with frustration may experience the dark emotion very briefly, perhaps without even being conscious of it. The teacher who copes ineffectively with frustration may experience the dark emotion for minutes, hours or longer.

A journal entry in December, in which I theorize why some teachers complain so much, describes my idea about the inherently frustrating nature of teaching.

> *I think that the most intractable quandary for teachers is the assumption that our job is to influence the cognitive and social learning of students, all students. The dilemma here is that no one can make someone else learn. It's a maxim among psychotherapists that the patient has to want to change before any change can occur. It's the same with any kind of learning, with any aged person. People have to want to learn, or change. So, as teachers, we initiate educational experiences that might facilitate learning, but it is problematic how students will interact with these experiences. This is why writers of constructivist epistemology have reframed teachers as facilitators, in the recognition that no one can make someone else learn.*
>
> *Students who have extraordinary social or emotional or academic problems, or their mental state is really at variance with the school curriculum, may tend to interact with our educational agenda in ways that do not result in desirable outcomes. When teaching in a high-poverty school with a large number of students with special needs, it is not unusual for teacher intentions and student intentions to clash most of the time. Even in the most middle-class schools, only most students will learn, as we would like them, most of the time. There will always be students who do not learn, for a variety of reasons (the first, I admit, is a curriculum that is a bad match with students). And I am referring to both academic and social learning. It is virtually impossible for students' social behavior to be impeccably consistent with teacher expectations or responsive to teacher directions. Limited results, daily, can be a frustrating thing for a teacher. And frustration leads to teachers' favorite avocation: complaining. (December 18, 1998)*

Certainly, there are many opportunities for teachers to feel affirmed by student learning and development. However, there are as many opportunities for the multitudinous moments of frustration, many small and some large, that permeate everyday teaching. How teachers effectively cope with these dark emotions is not the subject of this paper. But the thesis of the present study re-presents itself: public school teaching is inherently stressful and emotional, and the stress and emotion of teaching is *contained* in the role and the situational, social and cultural context of public schools.

<u>The Threat of Dark Emotions:</u>

Cover Up and Emotion Management

When attacked, the self tends to respond in a way that is protective or defensive. When attacked, we inevitably take what some observers call "political" action to change the situation (or change ourselves) so we can again feel competent or at least we are less vulnerable to public disapproval (Blase, 1991; Kelchtermans, 1996) There are a number of strategies teachers use to defend or protect their selves, including some of the following: isolation; passive resistance; working in schools in which the working conditions align more closely with their selves; modifying their selves to accommodate changed working conditions; finding alliances with reference groups; and impression management (Nias, 1989). How I used these strategies to deal with the pressure of teaching is the subject of other papers. The last strategy, impression management, relates directly to emotions and is addressed in the next section.

I worked continuously on managing my emotions. I believe that I, as teacher, was engaged in an almost *continuous* state of emotional management when I was with the students. Hochschild (1983) developed the idea of *emotional labor*, which is when the individual inhibits or expresses an emotion in order to elicit an emotional response in someone else. I believe that teaching is, fundamentally and inescapably, emotional labor. Hochschild (1983) proposed three criteria for work that requires emotional labor. First, it requires face-to-face contact with the public; second, it requires that the worker produce an emotional state in another person; and third, there is a degree of external control over the emotional labor of the employee.

Teaching obviously fulfills the first two criteria. The third criteria for teachers, external control, comes in the form of cultural expectations. The "external control" is subtle and indirect. The profession does have generalized notions about how teachers, good teachers, emote. For teachers, the "rules" about emotional behavior are embedded in particular schools and in the general culture of teaching. For example, teachers are supposed to enjoy children, enjoy their work, maintain a patient and kind front, become angry with children very infrequently and at only special times, etc. These rules are not taught formally to teachers, but they are collaboratively constructed in the everyday work of teachers, students, principals, parents, and teacher educators.

Bringing a dramaturgical perspective to human behavior, Hochschild goes on to distinguish two types of emotional display, surface acting and deep acting. In deep acting, the person "gets into" the role, almost like method actors, and there is no disconnect between their outward appearance and generally how they feel. In surface acting, the surface effects associated with emotions, such as smiling, frowning, sighing, and laughing, are put-on and do not reflect how the actor is really feeling. In both types of acting, emotions don't just happen. Rather, the actor has actively manipulate his mind. For example, a teacher who is grumpy just before school, for reasons unrelated to work, consciously remembers wonderful past images of her students, her reasons for going into teaching, her love of her students...and by this purposeful "exhorting (of) feeling" or making use of his imagination is able to both appear and feel happy when the students come through the door. This is deep acting. However, if the teacher is unable to draw upon imagery or experience to "exhort feeling" that is appropriate to the situation, then he may simply look the part without the accompanying feeling. Hochschild warns of the dangers of surface

acting, since it leads to an alienation of our working lives and our more natural selves. We become alienated from the part of our self that does the work.

In any case, I did much emotional management as a classroom teacher. This came in the form of both deep and surface acting, and I hope that most of the time I did deep acting. However, the strain on me to manage emotions was not something that I anticipated in an explicit way, as a formal feature of my work as a teacher. But as I read through my journal, entries where I explicitly exhort myself to manipulate my emotions alerted me to the phenomenon of emotional labor. And the dozen or so instances in which I explicitly exhort myself to suppress or instantiate an emotion, most likely, is just the tip of the iceberg of a behavior that occurs in a minute-to-minute basis for teachers, when they are with students.

Here are some journal entries that illustrate efforts to do surface and deep acting. Notice that these entries, describing explicit attempts to manage emotions, come primarily from the beginning of the school year. After January, I was less conscious of this mental maneuvering as I became more skilled and fluid at managing my emotions.

The following five entries describe surface acting, in which I worked to disguise my real feeling, when I would be *pretending* to be what I was not.

> *As lousy as I feel, it is crucial that I be "up" with the students. I need to laugh, smile, and stay grounded when teaching. The work to maintain a positive outward persona is, itself, stressful, since my authentic feelings are anxiety, depression, and sometimes anger.*
>
> *Ironically, in spite of my dissatisfactions with my mental health, my teaching and the progress of the students, the students all seem to be happy, they like me and the parents seem to feel the same way. Go figure. (September 22, 1998)*

> *As difficult a time as I am having with management, developing curriculum, and teaching, it is crucial that I am upbeat and happy with the students, at least on surface. When I let them in the room after lunch break, and I feel a bit of a knot in my stomach, I greet each individual student with a handshake or hug. When things go awry, I almost force myself to laugh. When students really bug me, I will occasionally hug them. (September 24, 1998)*

> *Nathan received an in-school suspension today. He threatened another child before school. This is part of the school district's new zero-tolerance policy on violence or the threat of violence. I visited him to leave some math work. He didn't express sadness at being left out of the class for the day. When I told him that I'd missed him (which I didn't), he said, "Well, I didn't miss you." (October 6, 1998)*

> *When Crystal and I reached an impasse in the power struggle, I wasn't able to distance myself from the situation, so my exchanges with her were emotional, angry and a bit histrionic. I need to distance myself from these problems and, instead, respond*

*dispassionately...and with a pleasant face. (November 6, 1998)*

*Today I decided to deflect any of her obnoxiousisms without emotion and with a benign smile and a calm rational response like, "Please raise your hand." (January 13, 1999)*

Here, I realize that I need to *appear* friendly or unaffected as a teacher. By providing the kids with a full and honest display of depression, anger or anxiety, which is what I sometimes felt, would have been poor pedagogy and it would have been inconsistent with the norms of the teaching culture. By poor pedagogy, I mean that a display of these emotions would not helped me more effectively manage the class and teach. Besides, there is strong social/cultural pressure on me to display an emotional front that is inconsistent with what I am really feeling.

The next two journal entries show explicit attempts to do deep acting, when I either exhort myself to feel a certain way or use my imagination to recollect an experience that would help me have an emotion that reflected my self and my beliefs about how *should* feel.

*I felt pretty much out of control for most of the afternoon. Whenever I felt myself become hot with stress, I focus my mind on a friend who was just diagnosed with cancer. My problems with classroom management pale in comparison with my friend's problem. (January 19, 1999)*

*I am reading the book, Tuesdays with Morrie. It's about coming to terms with death and, in the process, life. Morrie suggests one practice he learned from Buddhism. Imagine a bird on your shoulder that continuously reminds you, "Today is the last day of your life."*

*If this were the last day of my life, I know that I would ignore the small details and, instead, focus on the wondrous and beatific aspects of my existence. I started to talk to my imaginary bird, on the shoulder, yesterday in class. It worked. (October 22, 1998)*

A third example of deep acting occurred whenever my job-share partner, Dorothy, and I would cross paths as she prepared to leave the building around 11:30am and I entered the class to take over for the afternoon. Her last words to me, almost every day, were, "Love those kids!" After a few weeks of this, I theorized that her meaning of these words was that I should remember that the students are, ultimately, still children and that I should accept them as such. As children, they inevitably were going to behave irascible, antsy, emotional, bored, talky, etc. I often used Dorothy's reminder to help me reframe my emotions, so I would be calmer and more accepting of the children's peccadillos.

In the following entry, I engage in both surface (first paragraph) and deep acting (second paragraph).

*...when things go awry, I work hard to never lose my cool. On surface, I stay even (psychologically) and work to redirect, either my own teaching moves or the students.*

*When I send a student to time out, I try to do it with empathy, such as "I'm really sorry you chose to go to time out, but..."*

*I sometimes remember to laugh with the students, especially at their intentional or unintentional jokes. When I commit a teaching faux pas, I might let my hair down with them. For example, I was drinking iced coke in an unmarked cup. It was sitting on the overhead projector, and in my excitement when teaching a lesson on fractions, I knocked it over. The students were horrified that I put ice in my "coffee." Concerned that they would find out that I drink Coke when teaching, I lied and said that I drink iced coffee. I then volunteered to go to time-out, where I filled out a time-out form. The students and I had a good time with this. (October 1, 1998)*

The management of emotions is a fact of life of the minutia of all everyday relations. As a teacher, it entails two dimensions: first, I manage emotions to hide or suppress socially undesirable emotions and to show desirable emotions; and second, I manage emotions in order to influence my students to exhibit certain emotions that I believe are important. For teachers, the demand or need to "be up", enthused, interested, empathetic, concerned, and receptive to students and parents is a minute-by-minute dimension of work. It is unrelenting and emotionally exhausting. A child tells you that school is boring. A parent criticizes how you teach math. Little Mary is sad about her deceased puppy. Little Joey is happy about the new puppy that his mother expectedly brings to the class in the middle of math period. A parent observes your class out of control. The kids are about to walk in after lunch recess, you feel bloated and tired from lunch and would rather be in bed but you have to find some inner store of psychic energy to survive the next ten minutes. The kids walk in and no one listens to directions. In spite of how you really feel, the cultural expectation to emote "professionally" is clear and unambiguous, although tacit.

Finally, there is the emotion that teachers display in order to evoke a desired emotion in the students. If I want the students to be excited about some math activity, my affect should communicate similar excitement. If I want my students to take the classroom rules seriously, I need to exude seriousness. If I want my students to feel empathy, I need to show empathetic feelings.

## Implications for Teacher Education

Teachers are essentially self-referential (Nias, 1989). Everything that we do and experience, as teachers, interacts with our sense of our selves, and this interaction can either lead us to a sense of satisfaction with our work, or it can lead to dissatisfaction and despair. My biography and my personality came together with this particular teaching situation and these particular students, along with the larger material, structural and cultural context...and my emotions in a very basic way expressed how I experienced this complex interaction. My personality here is undeniably a factor in how I responded to challenging experience that elicited emotion. Still, I suspect that most teachers, independent of their personality, experience the range of emotions that I did as their work interacts with the situational, material, structural and cultural contexts.

Given the present and mostly historic conditions surrounding our work, my interpretation of the data leads me to an irritating conjecture: public school teaching is an inherently pessimistic endeavor. Teachers faced with large numbers of students; increasing numbers of high need students; reduced services and reduced budgets; compulsory attendance; the constrained physical arrangement of classrooms; rigid time schedules; rigid externally-imposed evaluation systems for students and teachers; and unrealistic cultural expectations for what teachers are supposed to do! A missing link in teacher education is its failure to more systematically address the relationship between our teaching performance, our felt experience about our performance and the larger situational and socio-cultural contexts. Many teachers are entering the profession unprepared to understand the this problematic and inescapable dimension of real-life teaching, and it is this unpreparedness that may leave teachers at extraordinary emotional vulnerability and risk.

It is crucial that teachers be optimistic and enthusiastic about their work, since it is teachers' attitude about of work (and life) that is, perhaps, the most important lesson for students. Besides, teachers who are happy in their work will, most likely, stay in the profession longer, have more opportunities to experience professional growth and development and, in effect, better serve students and society. Optimist that I am, I believe that teachers *can* effectively cope with the emotional risks inherent in this work. Therefore, I have the following recommendations, some of which reflect missing links in teacher education.

1. Teacher education should provide students with opportunities to examine the emotional dimensions of teaching and how they reflect the interaction of self and the exigencies of teaching, including the material, structural and cultural conditions of schools. Teachers need to explore their own selves, their biographies, and the quality of their own mental health. Given the emotional stress of teaching, the profession would be well served if young teachers have opportunities to reflect on their own psychological readiness to help children who need a lot of emotional support. Maslow (1973) maintained, "The best helpers of other people are the most highly evolved, healthiest, strongest most fully developed people" (p. 153). Therefore, programs in which students can explore their own selves is warranted in teacher education (e.g., Tickle, 1999).

It would be useful for teachers to understand the notions of surface and deep acting as well as strategies to engage in deep acting, which is a healthier form of emotion management. As important, perhaps, young teachers should learn to that it is appropriate and even a virtue to psychologically distance themselves from their work. Hochschild explains the danger for workers whose self is totally merged with their role: when the working conditions worsen or bad things happen on the job, the worker may suffer a completely negative experience because he or she can't distance themself, or depersonalize. Two outcomes are typical when self and role are welded together and the working conditions are stressful. The person works harder and burns out, or the person leaves the job emotionally (what Hochschild calls "going robot"), which leaves the worker prone to feelings of guilt. Hochschild suggests that a more effective response is what she calls, "healthy estrangement...a clear separation of self from the role. They clearly define for themselves when they are acting and when they are not; they know when their deep or surface

acting is 'their own' and when it's part of the...show" (p. 188).

2. Teacher education needs to take a more tentative and provisional perspective on the "possibilities of teaching". Of course, we need to articulate the ideals and beliefs that guide and envision our work, which I believe is to make the world a more equitable and just place. But at the same time, there needs to be some "healthy estrangement" from these ideals, by recognizing the complexity of the teaching-learning process and all the social, political and economic factors that play into student outcomes. Our work with students is fraught with mediating and impeding realities of life which limit our effectiveness. The culture of teaching and its accompanying rhetoric may do more harm than good, by lulling beginning teachers into unrealistic expectations. Part of the culture of teaching is that teachers are perfect, in their public and personal lives (A. Hargreaves, 1994). However, teachers usually can *not* care for all students. Teachers usually can *not* meet the academic needs of all students. Teachers usually can *not* meet the needs of the whole child (whatever *that* is). The perfectionism implicit in much of the rhetoric of teaching is the basis for teacher guilt, when we realize that we are, in fact, imperfect as teachers and we can't live up to the billing.

Teachers should study the factors that limit what they can plausibly do with students. Central factors that limit teachers include the coercive reality of compulsory education, the imperative for teachers that their teaching be oriented to group needs instead of individual needs and interests, uniform learning standards, and large class sizes. Some of these factors are inescapable in public education. Beginning teachers, especially, should systematically study the inherently frustrating nature of teaching, and the "fact" that this feeling of frustration is sensible given the structural conditions of teaching. I wonder if it would enhance teachers' satisfaction with their work if they could more fully understand, accept and work effectively within the limitations and partialness of any educational endeavor. (I suspect that some preservice teachers would not finish their programs if the realities of teaching were more thoroughly examined early on in their education.)

3. Teachers' work is influenced by forces outside the classroom. Politics and policy decisions at various levels, from the local school building to the federal level, impact teachers' working conditions. In the environment of reduced funding for public education, an expectation that we "do more with less", more prescriptive curricula mandated by legislatures, and more heavy handed accountability systems, it doesn't take a seer to understand that this has to have serious implications for the emotional life of teachers. The apparent intensification of teachers' work (Apple, 1989) is symptomatic of larger economic and political trends in our society. The result for teachers, what Cohen, Higgins and Ambrose (1999) ominously call the "killing of the teaching profession", is basically rooted in a political and economic system that has become increasingly market-driven, competitive, and favorable to those who already have a piece of the pie. Conservative political and bureaucratic interests are ascendant in educational policy and practice, certainly at the federal and state levels. In this environment, teachers are at more risk than before of losing control over their expertise and their time. In this environment, it is increasingly more difficulty for teachers who work in poor schools and with families on the

fringes of the economic expansion.

Most teacher education programs fail to bring a critical perspective to the larger economic and political contexts that inevitably impact the working conditions of teachers. Teachers need preservice experience that might help them develop the predisposition and skills to take advocacy positions and political action on behalf of public education. However, part of the problem for teachers in taking political action is the fact that, to be a good teacher, it often requires immersion in one's classroom work. Political action tends to take one's time and attention away from "the kids", which is teacher's main concern and motive. There is a trade-off for idealistic and effective teachers who completely immerse themselves in their classrooms. Grace (1978) describes the dilemma for socialist teachers in England.

> Total immersion in the life of the school (and the many problems associated with inner-city schools seemed to demand this of concerned teachers) involved for some a threat to their intellectual and social vitality and wholeness for others, a threat of incorporation into welfare liberalism. For the former, to become the ideal teacher was to place at risk 'being a person' and for the latter, it was to place at risk 'changing the world' (p. 187).

Teachers need to understand that their immersion in the classroom has its tradeoffs, as does their decision to take a more activist political position. My bias is that the tradeoff come in teachers becoming more political, and the temporary loss of their effectiveness in the classroom may be more than offset later on if their political work is effective and the system become more supportive of public education. However, the difficulty here is that the identity of most teachers is located "with the kids", in a caring and relational motivation. Perhaps if teacher education more fully explored the political/advocacy dimensions of teaching, this dimension of teachers' self would be nurtured and political action would become more a part of teachers work.

4. Teacher education has recognized, for some time, the power of story in the development of teachers (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The idea is for teachers to come together and share their stories, for the purpose of helping each other deepen their understandings of teaching experience. Particularly in helping them understand their own vulnerability in a hostile environment, it is crucial that teachers have opportunities to share their stories and, in effect, affirm each others' worth and the validity of each others' experience (cf., Kelchtermans, 1996; Noddings, 1996). It is also important that teachers feel free and unthreatened to tell the truth, and that their stories accurately depict both the dark and bright emotions of their work. Newkirk (1992) said, "I confess that I have become increasingly estranged from much of what I now read. There is an emotional turbulence and a frequency of failure in my own teaching that I don't see reflected in many accounts, including ones that I have written or edited myself" (p. 23). Teacher education needs to make authentic stories available, especially for beginning teachers, so they have models from which to tell their own.

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